

'Big Jim' heads United into final Magpies tear form book to shreds

By Ken Houston

Maidenhead United 1, Wycombe Wanderers 0

WHEN it was learned that Maidenhead United would play Wycombe in the semi-finals of the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup, many local football fans were pessimistic.

"Okay," they smiled, "maybe the Magpies beat Slough, but Wycombe... Well, that's another matter."

The most, many thought, Maidenhead United would get out of this game was a good gate.

Everything in the form book pointed to a Wycombe win. But again, Maidenhead tore the form book in shreds.

Determined

From the word go, Maidenhead looked a determined combination. Even during the first half when things were at their worst, when the Wycombe forwards were pounding balls at Peter Spittle left right and centre, the Magpies seemed determined to stay in the game.

Determination, I think, sums up the reason for Maidenhead's victory. Sure, they did not win this match completely devoid of skill—their match-winning goal was a brilliant piece of football—but without the guts they showed on Saturday then I think the result would have been different.

Their determination was first shown early on when Wycombe began to pound the Maidenhead defence with a series of onslaughts which lasted throughout the first half.

Wycombe's first dangerous move came after seven minutes when Hutchinson intercepted a goal-kick by Spittle and slipped the ball over to Searle on the right, who in turn smacked it over to the far post. Spittle just managing to punch the ball over the crossbar.

Once Wycombe had tasted blood there was no letting up. With Anthony, Searle and Hutchinson leading the way, they gave the United defence their busiest Saturday afternoon since the league game against Walton & Hersham last November.

Goal-line clearances

Up to half-time there were at least two clearances off Maidenhead's goal-line and many more shots which were just too wide or too high.

Blunt, wearing a number six jersey, often went upfield to assist the forwards and he made himself particularly dangerous after half-an-hour when he sent a rocket shot just over the bar from 30 yards.

But in the dying minutes Maidenhead, who had hardly worried Wycombe at all during the first half, suddenly showed their teeth when Hartridge was unlucky with a good shot from a Woolley corner which O'Brien just managed to save.

The second half opened with Wycombe starting where they had left off, Blunt and Anthony both coming close with good attempts.

However, not long after the kick-off Maidenhead began to come out of defence and into attack and more and more of the action began to take place in the Wycombe half.

In the 54th minute John Clements, who had earlier suffered a leg injury, was injured a second time and was replaced

by substitute Geoff Hester.

Not long afterwards another player left the field—Wycombe's Keith Searle.

Following a Maidenhead move upfield, Searle suddenly broke away down the right wing. Hard on his heels went Ian MacPhee and as Searle was about to move into the middle, MacPhee caught up with him and brought him down.

Marching orders

The referee immediately awarded a free-kick, but Searle got up and foolishly retaliated. He was given his marching orders while MacPhee was later booked.

Wycombe were now down to 10 men but by this time the tide had already begun to turn.

Yet, late in the game, it looked as if Maidenhead had given the show away. Terry Runicles, defending a break-away, intercepted the ball and passed back to keeper Spittle. However, the pass back was too wide for the keeper to reach and both Runicles and Spittle stood horrified for a split second as the ball rolled towards the net. Both men immediately ran towards goal in an attempt to retrieve the ball with Jim Hartridge also joining in the chase. The ball, however, just hit the post. Another couple of inches and the Magpies would have been out.

But that terrible moment was forgotten a few minutes later. During a Maidenhead attack they were awarded a free-kick inside the penalty box on the right. Howarth took the kick and he could not have done better had he tried. The ball sailed from the right over to the far post where big Jim Hartridge was waiting to head downwards into the net.

For my money, every Maidenhead player deserves credit for a spirited performance but I think special mention must go to Hartridge, Pitts, Howarth and Chatterton.

For Wycombe, Searle and Blunt were always dangerous while English international sweeper John Delaney acted magnificently in defence.

Maidenhead's opponents in the final, little Wolverton Town and BR, have done a bit of giant-killing too in this year's competition. However, I cannot see them preventing the Magpies from lifting the cup after the final at Chesham on Easter Monday.

Maidenhead—Spittle, Runicles, Richardson, Hartridge, MacPhee, Pitts, Woolley, Howarth, Chatterton, Underwood, Clements (Hester).

Wycombe—O'Brien, Faulkner, Gale, Lailey, Delaney, Blunt, Suddaby, Baker, Anthony, Searle, Hutchinson, Sub.: Stephenson.